

Greek America Oral History Project

Oral History Interview

With

Irene Compoginis

April 3, 2006
Sacramento, California

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Greek American Oral History Project

Interview History for Oral History of
Irene Compoginis

Interviewer's Name: Josie S. Talamantez

Interview Date and Location: The interview was conducted on April 3, 2006, in Irene Compoginis' home in Sacramento, California

Context Notes: Mrs. Compoginis is the daughter of Greek immigrant parents. During the interview, Mrs. Compoginis refers to photo albums containing a vast history of her family and the Greek Orthodox Church of the Annunciation. The tape was stopped once while Mrs. Compoginis received a phone call. There are a few noise distractions on the tape—in the beginning noise coming from outside and one time when the tape was hit by a photo album.

Mrs. Compoginis is a very pleasant person and the interview reflected her style. She uses a lot of "and ah" which I have removed from the written transcript.

Tapes and Interview Records: The original tape recording of the interview and a full transcript are held by the Greek Orthodox Church of the Annunciation in Sacramento. Copies of the recording and transcript are deposited with the Department of Special Collections and University Archives at California State University, Sacramento. And a single copy of the written transcription and tape were sent to Mrs. Copoginis.

[Session1, April 3, 2006]

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

TALAMANTEZ: This is an interview with Irene Compoginis in her lovely home on April 3, 2006. And this is an interview for the Greek American Oral History project for Sacramento State University. And, um, Irene, I am just going kind of I have questions, but tell me a little bit about your self tell me about where you come from tell me if your folks were from here or from Greece. Tell me your history

COMPOGINIS: Well honey, my father was from Greece, he came when he was 15 years old. And ah, landed on Ellis Island. And ah, from that very beginning he was extremely special. And ah, my mother came when she was about; I guess about 15/16. And I still can't believe it the high school that she started here in Sacramento was where the Memorial auditorium is and was called the Mary Jane Watson High School.

TALAMANTEZ: Wow, What year was that?

COMPOGINIS: And my father was...let's see, that was ah. That was early on 19 ah bout 15/16. And my farther was ah. When did he come ah?. It was ah probably he was 15 years old and he was born, ah in ah, in Vólos Greece. And ah, oh gosh, I can't remember how old he said

he was. But he landed in ah because another man came from Vólos,
he met him in ah Marysville Yuba City.

TALAMANTEZ: Oh Wow.

COMPOGINIS: And he went up there and that Mr---- oh gosh what was his name?
He took him under his wing and ah, he stayed there until he was
about ah I don't know, 19/20...

[Showing photographs]

COMOGINIS: And ah, this is a picture of him, of he family, my father, my
mother, this is quite a while ago. This was in 1937

TALAMANTEZ: Oh, good looking family, where are you?

COMPOGINIS: He was. . . this is, that's my little sister Georgia, this is me, my
sister Maria, my sister Stella, my brother Stanley, who we lost in a
1954 in a North Korea in a B-29. A very special young man and
the whole history is in here of course. He became very close to the,
ah, to Governor Earl Warren and his family because he because he
was a friend of Earl Warren Jr. But anyhow, my mother went in to
have. My father was . . . she was working with her father in his
shoe shop down on, let's see where they were. They were on, I
don't know, 8th and L and his name was, my grandfather was
George Andrews, had his had his own shoe shop. And, my father
went in, and said, "I need to have the heels fixed on my shoes." My

mother waited on him. Then he went back again and asked her to go out with him [chuckle]. And they were, let's see, what year were they married? 19, 1918/1919 probably and I was born in 1925 here in Sacramento. And I think at that time they called it the Sacramento hospital where I was born. And of course, I was christened in the church but I am not sure if it was 620 N Street if we were there yet 1925. I was christened in 1920 the first part of 1926. And from there we just grew up and just went to church at 620 N Street. Went to Greek school down there. This is the picture of the all of us that were in the Greek school. And you can see by the year it was 19. . .

TALAMANTEZ: 33

COMPOGINIS: And it says 33, yes. So I was about 8 years old. I am right over here on the end right there, yes. And our teacher was, I am sure other people have told you, was Mrs. Athanasu Boulus, Mrs Boulos [phonetically spelled]. And she was a wonderful wonderful lady. And we went to Greek school. I think we went twice a week. And my father would take us; my mother did not know how to drive, never learned how. And my father took us to Greek school whenever we went.

TALAMANTEZ: And so how long did you go to Greek school?

COMPOGINIS: Oh, I guess, till I was about, I don't know 13 14.

TALAMANTEZ: Twice a week?

COMPOGINIS: Oh yeah, we did, we went to Greek school. We spoke Greek at home.

TALAMANTEZ: And then the school, what was the purpose of the school, the culture?

COMPOGINIS: Oh, all of it the...

TALAMANTEZ: The language?

COMPOGINIS: The language, how to write it, how to read it. And she was a wonderful wonderful teacher. She's in the picture, of course, yes

TALAMANTEZ: And this was behind the church?

COMPOGINIS: At the beginning it was behind the church at 620 N Street. We didn't go to Annunciation until 19, what was it, 1952, I think I can't remember exactly. And I was going say there is a lot of history. I don't know, did anyone let you in the library down at the church?

TALAMANTEZ: Not me, but...

COMPOGINIS: Because there is a lot of books down there. We have those books, and I took those books out because my sons were in 1955 this young man was on the parish council, [noise from moving the albums around] my son Stanley. And in 1950. . . I don't know if it

was 52 or 53 I don't have of picture of him down in there, these books are down in the library.

TALAMANTEZ: OK, I will make sure they have access to them.

COMPOGINIS: And my oldest son John, who is now 58, was on the parish council in 1952/53 but he is not in this book. And I don't know if he is in any of the books down in the church. I haven't, and these are the only books that I have. And these books are down in the library.

TALAMANTEZ: OK

COMPOGINIS: They might help you. And, ah well, after we went to Greek school we went to church. And we'd go very Sunday. And one of the things that was interesting at 620 N Street. I am not sure; I think I was about 10 years old. The, um, I don't know if anyone else remembers this. The women with the children would sit on one side and the men would all sit on the other side. They did not sit as a family. So one Sunday, it didn't take very long my mother was very, well she became the first president of the Philoptochos. I don't know if anybody talked about it, the women's organization. And one Sunday she said, "we are suppose to go to church as a family and we're suppose to sit as a family, and I am going to take you all and we are going to sit right there where we can all fit and, if the priest doesn't want us to he will tell us to go back and sit with

all the women." Well we sat there and everybody, we knew, they were looking at us, but the following Sunday all of the families went and sat together.

TALAMANTEZ: Your mother was a pioneer, wasn't she?

COMPOGINIS: Oh honey she was, yes. And I was trying to think where I . . .

TALAMANTEZ: What was your mama's name?

COMPOGINIS: Kirakula [phonetically spelled] but it was Helen, you know, Helen Vantageous [phonetically spelled]. This was my father, I have his citizenship papers.

TALAMANTEZ: Look at that? I should have brought a camera.

COMPOGINIS: And I had to cut her picture out of there. This is her. Oh, he was great. She became the first president of Philoptochos. And ah, was absolutely amazing, belonged to all the PTA's [moving books around, tape has a static noise] at the schools. And because she was educated in high school, here in Sacramento. She, you know. She just was great. She always managed to. . .

TALAMANTEZ: Was she was born here or was she born in Greece?

COMPOGINIS: She was born in Greece

TALAMANTEZ: Born in Greece as well?

COMPOGINIS: She was born in Greece as well.

TALAMANTEZ: Beautiful lady.

COMPOGINIS: But like I said when she came she was just a young women, but she was fortunate that the high school was there. I could not believe it where the memorial auditorium was, but at that time the building was called the Mary Jane Watson High School.

TALAMANTEZ: And why did her family come to the United States? And why did they settle in Sacramento?

COMPOGINIS: OK. Her father decided that they should all come to the United States. And I am not sure if they did land on Ellis Island because she did not talk about it that much. But they came to Sacramento because her father wanted to come to the West Coast.

TALAMANTEZ: Did he know people here?

COMPOGINIS: Not that I know of. And not that she ever, not that they ever said anything but he came here and... well he knew the Greek people of course after they got here. Once he got the shoe shop going down there he just, you know, he met everybody. And I personally did not get to know him, my sister did. And he was born on the Island of Skopelos and I was trying to think what I did with that. . . I went with my husband to the Island of Skopelos and saw the island, went to Vólos, saw where my father was born.

TALAMANTEZ: Do you know why, on your father's side, why they came to Sacramento?

COMPOGINIS: My father came by himself, he was 15 years old, and his ah the man that he knew from Vólus was coming to the United States. His name was Mr. Vidurus, [phonetically spelled] Gus Vidurus. When he came to the west coast he went directly to ah Yuba City/Marysville. And so that was the only family my father knew. And he went to Yuba City/Marysville and Mr. Vidurus was kind of like a father to him.

TALAMANTEZ: And what kind of work did he do there?

COMPOGINIS: My father didn't at that time. He just, who ever needed help, you know, he was an immigrant. Oh I know as a young man he went into help, who was it? Oh, I think I had an uncle that was in the restaurant business and he went into help him. So he became a person that, you know, could cook and work in the restaurant. And in fact when he came, I was going to tell you, well, I told you how he met my mother she went into the shoe shop, she was at the shoe shop with her father, he went in and got his shoes fixed. And then, in 19...lets see what year was it? I can't remember but he was in a restaurant, at 210 K Street, my father was. And after we would go to church on Sunday we would walk down to Old Sacramento, 210 K Street, and go into the restaurant.

TALAMANTEZ: Was it a Greek restaurant?

COMPOGINIS: It was a Greek was called the Owl restaurant. It was Greek. Ah, the other man that was in with him was Greek. And ah, lot of the Greek people would go down to Old Sacramento and opened up restaurants. I don't know if you heard that from anyone else on your list.

TALAMANTEZ: Um, well I have interviewed only you so far and I am listening to the tapes of the other ones.

COMPOGINIS: Oh, I see ok, well you will hear it from the others. There were, I am trying to think of who else was down there at the time, I can't remember, everybody. But anyhow, yeah that was, we would go down to the restaurant on Sunday after church. I can remember my mother was very, ah, careful and refined and so she would always say don't look at people don't stare at people you know and well. And my father, at the restaurant had a counter out front, but it had booths in the back and he would always take us and seat us back in a booth in the back. And I am trying to think about what else we did. Besides going to Greek school we'd go to all the Greek affairs. And. . .

TALAMANTEZ: What kind of affairs? Tell me about some of the affairs?

COMPOGINIS: Everything was always held down at the. . .

TALAMANTEZ: Church?

COMPOGINIS: At 620 N Street in back of the church there was a large building and downstairs, was the hall [the drops a photo album] opps, and the kitchen and that is where they held the Greek school. But upstairs is where the priest lived in this building it was very interesting.

TALAMANTEZ: So what kind of work did your father do?

COMPOGINIS: He was in the restaurant business.

TALAMANTEZ: He went into the restaurant business?

COMPOGINIS: He went into the restaurant business right there at 210 K Street.

TALAMANTEZ: Oh OK. Got it.

COMPOGINIS: And in fact, he would come home every day at 3 / 4 o'clock and get us to Greek school. And was very very involved in the family.

TALAMANTEZ: And did you know his family in Greece, in Vólos?

COMPOGINIS: I did not get to know them until I got married and went to Greece with my husband. And that was a wonderful meeting. And we got to go actually to the house that my father was born in, in Vólos, yeah, that was wonderful. And then of course, we did, to the Island of Skopelos where my mother's father came from and his house was there, but we didn't go the house where she was born. And in fact because she came so early she was very Americanized, you know.

TALAMANTEZ: It sounds like it I mean she was ah she sat everyone in the church and pretty soon all the families were....

COMPOGINIS: She was very very active in the church.

TALAMANTEZ: And then the women's groups that she was active with, what was the purpose of that club?

COMPOGINIS: Well Philoptochos means um Friend of the Poor. And so they would do everything, they would cook, they would help people that came that needed help, and well in fact the organization is very active down at our church now.

TALAMANTEZ: Still today?

COMPOGINIS: Oh, still today, yeah. Very very wonderful and a, big part of the church. Very helpful with everything that goes on at Alhambra Blvd.

TALAMANTEZ: It's a beautiful church?

COMPOGINIS: Yeah yeah.

TALAMANTEZ: So how did you meet your husband?

COMPOGINIS: OK

TALAMANTEZ: And was he from Greece? Or was he from here?

COMPOGINIS: No he was from America. His family, his mother and dad came from Greece. And [clears her throat] I really didn't get to know my husband, I would see him at church and I would know who he was.

TALAMANTEZ: So he was raised here in Sacramento?

COMPOGINIS: He was raised here in Sacramento. He went to City College here. Was part of the Lockheed aeronautics school here and his, his mother and father is from Greece.

[Telephone phone rings, interruption]

COMPOGINIS: That's a sister. Did anyone tell you about Mary Kutsurelis? 96 years old.

TALAMANTEZ: Was she on the list?

COMPOGINIS: I don't think so, but she would be a wonderful person to talk to. And she knew my mother very well and they were very close and they worked for Philoptochos and ah, but this of course...

TALAMANTEZ: 96 years old.

COMPOGINIS: Mary Sister Elizabeth, a darling lady. But anyhow. .

TALAMANTEZ: You were in the church and you would see him, your husband?

COMPOGINIS: I would see him at church when we would go in and lite the candles. The group of young men sometimes would be standing there. But I didn't really get to know him until one time when our choir went down to Berkeley. And went to...

TALAMANTEZ: You were in the choir?

COMPOGINIS: I was in the choir. Went to the University of California and they had a dance there that night and I got to dance with him. He came

up and asked me to dance so then after we parted and came back to Sacramento, he was down at Lockheed. So one weekend when he came home from Lockheed he, ah, called and he said, "I would like to come by. "I know your mom and dad", he said, "but I would like to see them and I would like you to go to lunch with me." Yes we did that, he was just very special right from the beginning. [Clears her throat] it was very special. And I guess about ah because he was in Los Angeles every weekend when he came home, he didn't come home every weekend but the weekends that he did, he would call and we would go out. And it was so special because from the time we met he was extremely special. And so about 6 months no lets see about 4 months later, we, he decided we were going to get married and he asked me to get married. And it was so cute he said, "You know the Greek custom is you have to go ask the father and mother of the bride." And so, it was so cute, he came to our house, of course. We lived in that Victorian on 21st and V. I do not know if you know which one it is? It's in the history of Sacramento. My mother loved that house and when she saw it she told my father that's the house we're going to buy. So, any how, when he came, we had planned to go out that evening he said, "Well I'll come in and tell your mom and dad that I would like to

get married to you." And it was so cute; we were standing in the dinning room. He went to my dad and said, "I want to marry your daughter". My father said, "of course." [Laughter] He was just so darling about it and it was so sweet I am almost in tears thinking about it. It was so cute she looked at my Jim and he said to my mom, "Of course you know I want to marry Irene." She said, "If she doesn't marry you, I will" [laughter and tears] she just loved him right from the beginning. He was very special, very special man. AndI did not know I would get emotional over it but I am. And so. . .

TALAMANTEZ: So when you met him, met him in Berkeley, was it, ah, was your mom there, was it a chaperoned?

COMPOGINIS: No, my sister Stella was there. My sister that is 3 years younger than I am. And at, the beginning, ah, when he danced, he asked her to dance, first. And then he said to her, "I want to meet your sister. But I wanted to dance with you because I wanted to ask you to introduce me to her", he said. "Even though I know who she is, from the church." He said, he needed someone to say this is my sister Irene. So we did, from the minute we danced together I know it was going to be perfect. Yeah and honey I feel like I am talking too much.

TALAMANTEZ: No, that's what you are supposed to do here.

COMPOGINIS: Ok

TALAMANTEZ: And you got married in what year?

COMPOGINIS: 1947.

TALAMANTEZ: 1947.

COMPOGINIS: And we got married in the Greek Orthodox Church at 620 N Street.

And if you ever come back again, Josie, I have a beautiful album.

You can see that honey.

TALAMANTEZ: I will have to come back with a camera and take some pictures.

COMPOGINIS: Yeah ok. But ah, yeah, we got married in 1947. And right that week, he was already living in North Hollywood in a beautiful apartment, and his brother was living with him, Steve. But he told his brother when we get married you're moving out [chuckle]. So for two years then we did, we stayed in north Hollywood. And then he decided that he had enough of the aeronautics and he would be going up in the airplanes, you know, that he was supervising the building of. And but he couldn't he wanted to become a pilot but he had bad hearing. So naturally he couldn't do that. But, I can remember in North Hollywood, if he flew over where we were living, he would fly right over the apartment house and he would

tell me when he was going to be doing that in the P38. But anyhow, when we can back to Sacramento. Ah...

TALAMANTEZ: What year did you come back to Sacramento?

COMPOGINIS: We came back in 50, let me see, 47, 48; my oldest son was born in Good Samaritan in Los Angeles. And we came back when John was ah; well let's see John was about 8 months old when we came back to Sacramento so that was about in 1949. And we lived with his mom and dad for about 6 months. And then we bought a house over here, right over here, on Helen Way, it's about 4 or 5 blocks down.

TALAMANTEZ: You stayed close.

COMPOGINIS: Yeah. Then after we found this house for sale one day and we moved here.

TALAMANTEZ: Raised your family here?

COMPOGINIS: Yeah raised our boys here. They all went to school here. Went to Sacramento City College went to Berkeley, went to ah University of California. In fact, I have 6 grand children. I don't know if I should get started on them. But my oldest one who is 20, John is going to be 26 and he is medical school, three years in medical school at the University of California. And I have two grandchildren at San Diego State University. One our at

Sacramento State University, Anthony. And my little Nisa Irene, she's still in high school. She is going to be 17; she is still in high school.

TALAMANTEZ: What high school does she go to?

COMPOGINIS: Oh she goes to Elk Grove High School. And then I have Anthony, well first one is John, then Anthony, and then oh Andrew is at Law school. And Stephanie is at nursing school, San Diego State University. And after Stephanie it's Chris. Chris is at San Diego. So 6 grand children and I was able to be involved while they were being raised, it was more fun you can't believe it, I just enjoyed every bit of it.

TALAMANTEZ: So your three boys all lived in Sacramento, as well?

COMPOGINIS: All lived in Sacramento

TALAMANTEZ: So did you send them to Greek school?

COMPOGINIS: Actually at the beginning they went to Sunday school. But the Greek school wasn't involved as it was when when, you know, we were going to Greek school.

TALAMANTEZ: Do they speak the language, your boys?

COMPOGINIS: They understand it but they don't speak it as well [chuckle]. And the whole thing is they were great with their children, with my grand children, they sent them to Greek school; they sent them to

Greek dancing. And I was going to say, one of the pictures in there [looking at photo albums] my oldest grandson is, in the.... Oh here's the family, when we took the pictures for the... lets see I am trying to see where is the picture of the one in Greek school in dance school. Everyone knows my grandchildren from the dance school because they were so involved. Oh it is in there some where dear we'll find it.

TALAMANTEZ: So did the church move by then from 620 N Street?

COMPOGINIS: The church moved 19 in, I have trying to see when it was, in 1950, 52. Isn't it awful that I can't remember when the church moved?

TALAMANTEZ: Oh it's OK. That's ok.

COMPOGINIS: And I got very involved with the, at that time, we were starting the Sunday school. And I thought I had the marker in the page. But I did, I got involved in the Sunday school at Annunciation and in fact helped to teach.

TALAMANTEZ: So you used to teach Sunday school?

COMPOGINIS: Um hum. And my grandchildren were very involved in the Sunday school.

[Trying to find pictures in albums]

COMPOGINIS: Oh here it is, no this the family, what did I do with that picture of the dance group? Well I thought I had it marked.

TALAMANTEZ: And this is your grand children, that used too and does he still dance?

COMPOGINIS: My oldest grandchild. Oh he dances beautifully but he doesn't dance with the group. In fact as they got older they . . . where is John Michael, I can't find it. Oh that's the family, but anyhow, the children were very involved. Oh there it is. He was one of there lead dancers, the one right in the middle. Wasn't as tall as the rest of them.

TALAMANTEZ: This is very nice. And who used to teach the dance classes?

COMPOGINIS: We had very good dancers that used to teach the classes. And ah, the way I got involved was I would take my grandchildren every week when they had a dance lesson.

TALAMANTEZ: So, you would dance too?

COMPOGINIS: No only the children danced. We had one teacher per class. And the reason I would take them is because my daughter-in-laws were working.

TALAMANTEZ: These are beautiful costumes.

COMPOGINIS: Yeah. We do we have beautiful costumes.

TALAMANTEZ: Who makes the costumes, women from the church?

COMPOGINIS: Well the mothers all involved with the dance groups, all got involved with making the costumes.

TALAMANTEZ: These are beautiful costumes.

COMPOGINIS: And that's something that, some day you should go down there because they still have dance classes. And the children are still dancing. And it's a wonderful wonderful group. And, you know, there are more people that can tell you more about the dance groups down there. And in fact one of the girls in the office that, that works in the office, that Michele Panages, don't know if you know her? Her three boys have danced with the dance group. They do a beautiful job.

TALAMANTEZ: Are they teaching now?

COMPOGINIS: Well there, yeah the kids are learning how... well they all went to a ... they had a group that met... in ,ah, was it in Los Angeles? I can't remember where they had their convention this year but... In fact, take her name down, go talk to Michele Panages, because she can tell you more about it. I haven't been involved because I don't have any dancing right now. Well they all went to universities and high schools and that was it, you know.

TALAMANTEZ: So when your boys were little and they would go to, um,... there wasn't the Greek school the way it was...

COMPOGINIS: There was Sunday school.

TALAMANTEZ: Sunday school.

COMPOGINIS: We had a wonderful wonderful Sunday school, yeah.

TALAMANTEZ: So cultural events was that was everything was surrounded by the church or the church still sponsors all the cultural events.

COMPOGINIS: Definitely, oh yeah, yes. In fact one of the persons you should talk to is Despina Demas... [she spells the name] D e s p i n a Demas and her husband is now the president of the parish council, John Demas. And those are two people you would do well to talk to.

TALAMANTEZ: I think somebody has, probably, already talked to them. Because they were probably the first ones they went to

COMPOGINIS: I am sure they have.

TALAMANTEZ: Tell me about cultural events. Tell me what kind of celebrations.

COMPOGINIS: There's a holiday almost every weekend.

TALAMANTEZ: A good Greek Party. [Laughter]

COMPOGINIS: A good Greek party and the Greek people like to celebrate the name days.

TALAMANTEZ: Yeah.

COMPOGINIS: Down at the church beginning now, there is just going to be one Sunday after another that are all occupied down there because of Easter. In fact, this week the Senior League is going to get together on Wednesday for lunch. And now that the Greek Easter period has started you don't only go to church on Sunday you go during

the week. There is quite a bit of holidays during the week for Greek Easter.

TALAMANTEZ: So so forgive my my ignorance, is Greek Easter celebrated at the same time or after?

COMPOGINIS: It is going to be one week, let's see our Palm Sunday, going to be, is celebrated on American Easter.

TALAMANTEZ: That's what I thought. That's what I thought.

COMPOGINIS: And then, Greek Easter is the week after.

TALAMANTEZ: That's what I thought.

COMPOGINIS: It has always been that way. It's a little different.

TALAMANTEZ: Why is there difference? What's the difference?

COMPOGINIS: The Greek calendar dear is just different. And you know they go by what I suppose most of it is done by what's done in Greece. You would have to talk to our priest Father James Retelas would be able to tell more. I should know because I have gone every year you know I have been so involved with Greek Easter. And ah, we just, everything is just beautiful.

TALAMANTEZ: So, so when you were growing up there was a good size Greek community

COMPOGINIS: Yeah.

TALAMANTEZ: And now there is still a good size Greek community?

COMOGINIS: Excellent.

TALAMANTEZ: Big Greek community?

COMPOGINIS: Excellent. Really.

TALAMANTEZ: So, really, in growing up you really didn't have to go outside of your community? I mean you did but you could just live within your community and flourish?

COMPOGINIS: Live within your community and when we went to 620 N Street we were very involved and because my mom decided to become involved as the president of Philoptochos we just ah we were just involved in everything, it was just beautiful. And the ladies would go down, you know, if the affair was on Sunday they would be there on Sunday right after church cooking. And like I told you the hall was in back of the church, now the hall is, you know, Hellenic Center on Alhambra. And there is just a lot to be involved with the Greek community. It is just wonderful. Yeah.

TALAMANTEZ: It's wonderful. A good way to raise your children, to have the appreciation.

COMPOGINIS: Yeah.

TALAMANTEZ: Because a lot of times, you find that there is this push to really totally Americanize and not recognize your your culture.

COMPOGINIS: No, once you get in with the Greek community...

TALAMANTEZ: You don't get out ah?

COMPOGINIS: You don't [chuckle] your very involved. And it is just such a just a wonderful happy group you know everybody is just wonderful. And most of your close friends are, you know, Greek so we do we get very involved.

TALAMANTEZ: And did your did your children marry Greek?

COMPOGINIS: Actually, I have to be very honest with you. You take them to all the Greek affairs, in our case, it was where they all met at college. And so the girls all became Greek Greek Orthodox. They joined the church and all, the children were all, the grand children were christened in the Greek Orthodox Church. And ah, once they get away and go to college, they don't, they are not involved as much with the Greek. But after they got married they were down at the church every Sunday. The children were christened there, the children went to Sunday school there and our, my grandchildren, I can't believe how involved they got with the Greek dancing.

TALAMANTEZ: That is wonderful.

COMPOGINIS: Very special.

TALAMANTEZ: Yes. That's nice.

COMPOGINIS: Yeah.

TALAMANTEZ: And so so your, part of your family, where was your husband's family from, what part of Greece?

COMPOGINIS: Ah I have it written down. They were from, ah oh gosh, I have it written down, oh gosh, why can't I say it, [chuckle] I can't say it, isn't that awful? Ah, everyone knows where they were from. From the, Peloponnesus, yeah, yeah.

TALAMANTEZ: And his family, he was born here or he came from...

COMPOGINIS: No, they were born in Greece.

TALAMANTEZ: He was born in Greece?

COMPOGINIS: Yeah. They got married in Greece. My father-in-law was John Coboyanes, [phonetic] my mother-in-law was Gliqueria [phonetic].

TALAMANTEZ: What a beautiful name.

COMPOGINIS: Yeah. Yeah. It means sweet lady.

TALAMANTEZ: I love it. I love, I love your mother's name too.

COMPOGINIS: Well, this is my mother. Yeah

TALAMANTEZ: I know. I love her name.

COMPOGINIS: Kiliakua [phonetic]. But then after she got very involved with the, ah, American people here and in the schools, you know, she called herself Helen.

[looking at photo album]

COMPOGINIS: And, ah, this is when we were all little. And ah,, my father, my mother, my sister Maria, me, Stella. I made this album for my father.

TALAMANTEZ: Wondful album.

COMPOGINIS: I took my father home for six years when he needed to be with people, cause he had a stroke. And, but he was fine health wise thank God he came out of it. He could take care of himself. We did have a therapist that came in for the first year that he was recuperating.

[Looking at and pointing out photos]

COMPOGINIS: And, ah, my father, and, ah oh, my brother Stanley.

TALAMANTEZ: Oh, I love the outfit was he dancing?

COMPOGINIS: Yeah, he was. . .

TALAMANTEZ: He was a dancer, as well?

COMPOGINIS: He wasn't so much a dancer as he was just in the Greek costume.

[Looking at photos]

COMPOGINIS: This is an aunt and an uncle.

TALAMANTEZ: Beautiful.

COMPOGINIS: Yeah. This is our family as we grew up. Here we are, all of us. My oldest sister and her husband, and the brother I lost in Korea. And

unfortunately, I lost my little sister Georgia and my oldest sister Maria in the years when were growing up.

TALAMANTEZ: So they passed early ah?

COMPOGINIS: Yeah.

TALAMANTEZ: What did they pass from? What did they, illness or?

COMPOGINIS: Oh well she was ah sick for about a year. She just passed away two years ago.

TALAMANTEZ: Oh, I see.

COMPOGINIS: She was very involved. She was also a president of Philoptochos. Unfortunately, my sister Georgia, five children, they're beautiful children; all grown up here in Sacramento. And ah, she had melanoma.

[Looking at photos]

COMPOGINIS: My grandparents, George Andrew's family, the year 1920. Did I put when they were born? Well I didn't put where they came from.

TALAMANTEZ: This is a wonderful photo album.

COMPOGINIS: Oh yeah.

TALAMANTEZ: You did a really good job.

COMPOGINIS: I made this album because...

TALAMANTEZ: For your father.

COMPOGINIS: . . . was so involved with the family.

TALAMANTEZ: So he could look at it and remember.

COMPOGINIS: So he could look at it and remember. And I did it a lot too for my grand children as they were growing up.

[Looking at photos and identifying people]

COMPOGINIS: This is my brother George and ah I don't know who that is, I am trying to think [referring to someone in the photograph]. Oh, that was the first, ah, grand child, my sister Maria's daughter, this is my brother, my brother George, he lives in San Francisco.

TALAMANTEZ: Beautiful

COMPOGINIS: And ah, oh this was my brother Stanley...

TALAMANTEZ: I love this...

COMPOGINIS: My brother Stanley when he got married. And my mother and my father, in fact this is in the, probably Penny would remember those days, this is in Penny Kastanis' house, her mother and father were good friends of my mother and father. This is my mom with one of the PTA groups she belonged to. She was very very involved with the PTA. Oh, my Grandmother with her family. I am trying to remember who that grand child was... My mother at a Philoptochos gathering. Where the... I think that was the Arch Bishop, if I am not mistaken. My brother Stanley. Oh and this is when he was with the group that delivered milk to the starving

children in Europe. My brother Stanley and Earl Warren Junior went together because they became close friends over at CK McClatchy.

TALAMANTEZ: Right, right.

COMPOGINIS: And after they got acquainted and became close friends um Governor Warren would send a limousine to pick up my mom and dad [chuckle] so they could all have dinner together.

TALAMANTEZ: How wonderful.

COMPOGINIS: Yeah it was, it was so interesting. And one of the letters from him that he would write. He wrote letters often to my mom and dad. It was interesting. My brother is remembered in Arlington

Commentary

TALAMANTEZ: Wonderful.

COMPOGINIS: Yes, because he was in a B-29 when he...

TALAMANTEZ: When it went down.

COMPOGINIS: Yeah, when they went down.

TALAMANTEZ: These are so nice.

COMPOGINIS: And this is all the things that I put together for my dad to remember. And I don't know if you have been to our church?

TALAMANTEZ: I have been outside but have never been inside.

COMPOGINIS: OK. Well, my father donated one of the stain glass windows.

TALAMANTEZ: Uh huh, I have seen them.

COMPOGINIS: Have you seen them?

TALAMANTEZ: I have seen them.

COMPOGINIS: He donated one of those in the memory of my mother and my brother.

TALAMANTEZ: How wonderful.

COMPOGINIS: Yeah.

TALAMANTEZ: Did they make them here or in Greece?

COMPOGINIS: I don't know where they...no they made them here in the United States. In fact, other families have windows in the church. Have you been in the church?

TALAMANTEZ: I have never been in the church. I have seen it from the outside. I'm going to have to go. I am going to have to go; I am going to go to mass one of these days, over there.

COMPOGINIS: Are you dear? Call me maybe we could meet.

TALAMANTEZ: Oh, that sounds good.

COMPOGINIS: I would love to take you to lunch.

TALAMANTEZ: Oh, that's so nice.

COMPOGINIS: And I know you'd love to have lunch there too. In fact, maybe you could come to our Palm Sunday lunch.

TALAMANTEZ: Maybe.

COMPOGINIS: Yeah. Anyhow this is all things for my father. I shouldn't associ...., well I have to associate it with the church, because we've always

TALAMANTEZ: Everything surrounded the church.

COMPOGINIS: Oh yeah. Our whole family very involved with the church.

TALAMANTEZ: And then I guess annually around Labor Day there's a big Greek festival at the...

COMPOGINIS: Oh the Greek food festival at the community center.

TALAMANTEZ: At the community center is that associated with the church, as well?

COMPOGINIS: All of us that go to the church work there dear. Yeah [chuckle]. We're very involved all together, most of us. And in fact, we have already started cooking; you know every thing that's cooked...

TALAMANTEZ: For the food festival.

COMPOGINIS: We start early and do the cookies; you know, the Koulourakia

TALAMANTEZ: Yes.

COMPOGINIS: You know. And of course.

TALAMANTEZ: And how do you preserve them, you freeze them?

COMPOGINIS: The week be, well about two or three weeks before the food festival, we have a commercial freezer down on the back of the ah...

TALAMANTEZ: Church?

COMPOGINIS: The back of the community center, the Hellenic Center.

TALAMANTEZ: Yes. Yes.

COMPOGINIS: We do, we cook everything two or three weeks ahead of time and freeze it. And all the, the people that come to the food festival, we can't believe that they come...

TALAMANTEZ: Oh I, I go every year.

COMPOGINIS: Do you?

TALAMANTEZ: I work one block away from it and we wait for it. [Noise]

COMPOGINIS: You know then about all the people from the state. The first day of the food festival it's packed. We can't believe it. We love it.

TALAMANTEZ: Yeah. I work for the state, so we all.....

COMPOGINIS: So you know then...

TALAMANTEZ: And I work just right around the corner so we all go over there.

COMPOGINIS: How wonderful, dear. What, ah...

TALAMANTEZ: I work I work, in the Department of Justice building but I work for the State Arts Council.

[Side B Tape 1]

[Not on tape

COMPOGINIS: *Oh beautiful. Beautiful.*

TALAMANTEZ: *Yeah, I work for the Arts Council. That's why I was so interested in the dance and the costumes and the tradition.*

COMPOGINIS: *That's wonderful. Yeah.*

COMPOGINIS: *That's Wonderful dear, year. Oh here's my brother with Earl Warren Jr.]*

[Back to looking at photos]

TALAMANTEZ: They went to school together?

COMPOGINIS: They went to school together. Just became so close. And, were involved in everything together. And this is the lady that I asked you she, if you interviewed her, Helen Kutsurelis

TALAMANTEZ: She was beautiful.

COMPOGINIS: She was very involved with the church.

TALAMANTEZ: Very good.

COMPOGINIS: Here she is with my mother.

TALAMANTEZ: Oh look at that.

COMPOGINIS: I think that's the Governor.

TALAMANTEZ: That's your mom.

COMPOGINIS: Yeah.

TALAMANTEZ: I can recognize your mom already.

COMPOGINIS: Yeah. And ah.

TALAMANTEZ: Yeah there's the Governor. And that's Earl Warren.

COMPOGINIS: Yeah the Greek community has always been involved with ah...

TALAMANTEZ: And so what about. What about politics? I mean since the Governor's there. Has the Greek community been involved in the, in the, the political scene since we are here in the State Capitol?

COMPOGINIS: Well we do have people that have worked in the State Capitol. And they don't, you know, they haven't run for State office or anything. Ah, who do we have that was involved that was involved with? Well right now we have Phil Angelides, who's running... you know. And that family has always been ah, you know, very involved with the Greek community.

TALAMANTEZ: They go to the church?

COMPOGINIS: They go to the church um hum. And ah, I am trying to think, uh...

TALAMANTEZ: We are just going to have to get him elected [laughter].

COMPOGINIS: Yeah. But ah, we are all very concerned about what goes on because of our young people. You know, we want it to be super perfect for our young people. We're very, we have always been involved with our young people, the Greek community has.

TALAMANTEZ: You have to, that's the next generation.

COMPOGINIS: And that's, Yeah. They have to you know.

TALAMANTEZ: So what would you say with regard to language, obviously in your parents time the Greek school, and the language, and the culture was really important to preserve.

COMPOGINIS: That was important, at the time. Because we all learned the language, the service in the church is still part of it in Greek.

TALAMANTEZ: Good.

COMPOGINIS: Oh yeah. And we have, you know, our children went to Sunday school every Sunday. They always went into the church. And the priest always had service, you know, with the children were in there.

TALAMANTEZ: And connection to the homeland?

COMPOGINIS: And I would imagine that part of it is the connection to the homeland because we still get a Greek newspaper called the Observer. In fact, I got mine in the mail today I can show it to you if you like to see it.

TALAMANTEZ: In a bit we'll look at it.

COMPOGINIS: Yeah.

TALAMANTEZ: So what would you say if you were thinking about the values? Right now you just told me a very important thing is the preservation of the, of the, culture for the next generation. You

really take care of the young people. And um and that is obvious your family did the next generation uh...

COMPOGINIS: It goes right on down the line, dear.

TALAMANTEZ: Right, right.

COMPOGINIS: Yeah.

TALAMANTEZ: So if I was to think about your relationship say to the broader Sacramento, obviously your brother was involved with Earl Warren Jr. and you mother was involved in PTA and then you children naturally growing up. Ah well do you think the interaction between the Greek community and the broader community was a positive one all along or were there struggle, or struggles here and there or...?

COMPOGINIS: I would say positive.

TALAMANTEZ: Good.

COMPOGINIS: And I would say that the background that the children got at the church, at the Greek school that was ah...

TALAMANTEZ: The values.

COMPOGINIS: Part of the growing up

TALAMANTEZ: Did you ever hear your parents talking about, well not so much your mom because she came, she was here, but maybe your dad or or even your husband's parents missing their home.

COMPOGINIS: I would say that they missed Greece to a certain extent and they had all the wonderful memories of Greece. And I know when my husband and I went to Greece and met all the people and went to the different, you know, cities in Greece and met the people. It had to have been a wonderful background for them, they had a wonderful beginning.

TALAMANTEZ: And the church, is the church like the priest, like you showed me the Archbishop are they from Greece or are they from here.

COMPOGINIS: The Archbishop was definitely from Greece. And I remember when my mother first became very involved with Philoptochos the Arch when the Archbishop came to visit in Sacramento, my mother invited him to come to our home and he did come. And all the ladies in the Philoptochos group were there and I was very young and I was very impressed with this man coming through the door, you know, with his special hat.

TALAMANTEZ: I saw the [referring to the Archbishop's hat], it was wonderful.

COMPOGINIS: It was really very very special. And because our parents kept us involved with the Greek community, you see. It was very impressive and very informative and I have to say that I think it was a very special background.

TALAMANTEZ: And were you involved in Philoptochos, as well?

COMPOGINIS: In fact, I am on the board right now [chuckle]. We have a wonderful president, Donna Wagner. And I hope that you can come to the church someday when you can meet her. She is really very special and very much involved with Philoptochos. Philoptochos is very involved now in everything.

TALAMANTEZ: And so what's the latest event or things that you're doing in Philoptochos?

COMPOGINIS: Ok, there is going to be next Saturday, in at the church in the Hellenic Center there is going to be, all the women are coming for, what we are calling a women's retreat. It is going to be sponsored by Philoptochos. And if you could come, I would love for you to come Josie. I think that you'd love to hear the guest speakers.

TALAMANTEZ: Who's the guest speakers?

COMPOGINIS: I'd have to get the paper, do you...?

TALAMANTEZ: That's OK.

COMPOGINIS: I could get that, yeah.

TALAMANTEZ: It will be an all day event?

COMPOGINIS: It will be an all day event there gonna... In fact, there gonna start at, I think at 9 o'clock. And then after we go to church we are going to go into the Hellenic Center and have what they call Lenten

breakfast. And then the guest speakers are going to start their speeches. And after that there will be a Lenten lunch.

TALAMANTEZ: And what is a Lenten lunch?

COMPOGINIS: Lenten is for people that are trying to get ready for communion. So there is certain things that you don't eat, you know.

TALAMANTEZ: Meat.

COMPOGINIS: Yeah, right.

TALAMANTEZ: Sounds like my church

COMPOGINIS: Well where do you go to church?

TALAMANTEZ: I go to, sometimes to, the Cathedral or I go to the Immaculate Conception right there on Broadway.

COMPOGINIS: Oh yeah, I have been to the Cathedral. That is another thing that my mother found very interesting for all of us. She said we can go to other churches and hear what they have to say. It is important. And occasionally we would go the Cathedral when there wasn't some special function going on at the Greek Church.

TALAMANTEZ: And did you see the similarities in the service?

COMPOGINIS: The beauty of it, yes always special.

TALAMANTEZ: So right now the Philoptochos is having a women's event a women's retreat. What other kind of things do they do?

COMPOGINIS: Oh Philoptochos gets involved a lot with what goes on on Sunday after church. We all go into the Hellenic center for what they call the coffee hour. And many times Philoptochos gets involved, or a family will donate the coffee.

TALAMANTEZ: Oh that's wonderful.

COMPOGINIS: Philoptochos is very special and very involved.

TALAMANTEZ: And when you were at 620 N Street and your mom was running it, what kind of events would your mother organize?

COMPOGINIS: Ah, Philoptochos again and if we had a special Sunday the ladies would always go in and prepare ahead of time for it. That little 96 year old lady that I told you about, you got to meet her, she just has a wonderful memory for all of what we did down at 620 N Street. She was one of the workers ...

TALAMANTEZ: What was her name again?

COMPOGINIS: Mary [She spells out the name] K u t s u r e l i s.

TALAMANTEZ: Ok.

COMPOGINIS: In fact if you come to our church some Sunday, I'll take you to meet her.

TALAMANTEZ: Ok I will do that.

COMPOGINIS: She's very special and very well known and liked.

TALAMANTEZ: Memories. So when you think about it, what is the most, what is the fondest memory you have of your church and community growing up? Maybe an event, maybe a celebration, maybe just whatever? What do you think about?

COMPOGINIS: First thing would be my wedding, of course.

TALAMANTEZ: Of course, absolutely. A special event.

COMPOGINIS: All the other events at the church would be the weddings of my children.

TALAMANTEZ: Of course.

COMPOGINIS: They were all married in the Greek Church.

TALAMANTEZ: And I would have to say the Sunday school because I was so involved with my grand children. The Greek dancing because I was involved with my grand children.

TALAMANTEZ: Did they have Greek dancing when you were young?

COMPOGINIS: Ah, when we were at 620 N Street they had people that Greek danced. But we didn't have a Greek, you know, lessons. Most of the Greek dancing began at Alhambra, and ah, I guess I'd have to say those events were the most important. Yeah.

TALAMANTEZ: That's great. Well any other memories you want to through out and document about your church, mainly about when you growing up maybe your husband or your husband's family.

COMPOGINIS: Well, when we were growing up we went every Sunday to church, it was beautiful. And no matter what the occasion was, in the back of the church, which was in that hall that I told you about where our priest lived upstairs, and, the oh, all the occasions took place downstairs. I would say those were special.

TALAMANTEZ: Irene were your folks strict? Was the priest strict?

COMPOGINIS: I would say they were very strict, yeah.

TALAMANTEZ: So how did they deal when your mom sat the family, when the men were on this side and the women were on that side and your mom sat the family?

COMPOGINIS: I will never forget that Sunday when she said...

TALAMANTEZ: Did you get nervous?

COMPOGINIS: Well, because she just always made things look so

TALAMANTEZ: Easy?

COMPOGINIS: Beautiful and positive, you know. And I just can't forget that Sunday when she said, "because we're a family and your father is the main member of our family we're all going to go and sit together."

TALAMANTEZ: And what did your dad say?

COMPOGINIS: Well, my dad always listened to her because he knew that she was pretty sensible and so we did. We all sat together that Sunday and after that, the families all sat together. It was, I'll never forget that.

TALAMANTEZ: Your mother was a trailblazer.

COMPOGINIS: That was special, dear.

TALAMANTEZ: Did they ever talk about that later?

COMPOGINIS: Oh I am sure they did honey [laughter]. Being Greek they always did, yes I am sure. But the women that wanted to be with there families they just loved it, you know they always... She had a lot of good friends, and a lot of loving people.

TALAMANTEZ: Your mama was something else, huh?

COMPOGINIS: In fact, this is just, I didn't know I was going to be so emotional.

TALAMANTEZ: Oh that's ok. How about your husband's family, their involvement in the church, I mean?

COMPOGINIS: Well my mother-in-law was very lovely yeah and a very lovely women. My father-in-law was a darling man. And in fact, I'll never forget it, when our children were growing up they lived on 8th Avenue, I don't know if you know where Vic's ice cream parlor is?

TALAMANTEZ: Oh, of course. Yes.

COMPOGINIS: They lived up the block...

TALAMANTEZ: From Vic's Ice Cream.

COMPOGINIS: From Vic's ice cream and she wanted to see the children. Once a week we would get them over there. And in fact, you know we were there for quite a bit when we'd go and she would always walk them to the...

TALAMANTEZ: The ice cream parlor.

COMPOGINIS: Ice cream parlor. That was her favorite thing to do with her grand children. And it was it was extremely nice.

TALAMANTEZ: Was she involved in the, in the...

COMPOGINIS: She was involved with Philoptochos, oh yeah.

TALAMANTEZ: All the women were.

COMPOGINIS: And she was involved with GAPA.

TALAMANTEZ: What was GAPA?

COMPOGINIS: Well GAPA was the Greek, oh gosh, why can't I say it because, it's one of the other organizations that was a big part of the Greek community. GAPA and AHEPA, yeah.

TALAMANTEZ: Where your parents involved with that as well?

COMPOGINIS: My parents were involved with AHEPA and the Daughters of Penelope, yeah. That was another Greek group that's very involved.

TALAMANTEZ: Are these organizations still in existence today?

COMPOGINIS: Yeah, very much so with the church.

TALAMANTEZ: And what does GAPA do? What is that organization about?

COMPOGINIS: They are wonderful and they do everything and they are wonderful people. And they just...

TALAMANTEZ: What is the purpose of the club?

COMPOGINIS: The purpose of the club is to get these different groups together and they have meetings once a month and they love to get together.

TALAMANTEZ: And AHEPA?

COMPOGINIS: AHEPA is the group is all the men

TALAMANTEZ: Oh that's men.

COMPOGINIS: And the Daughters of Penelope is the women

TALAMANTEZ: Women.

COMPOGINIS: And Philoptochos is definitely the women.

TALAMANTEZ: The Women, OK.

COMPOGINIS: And if you ever get down to the church, Josie and get a chance to be involved with groups it would be nice.

TALAMANTEZ: To meet them.

COMPOGINIS: Yeah and if you ever want to go down, you call me and you know we'll meet.

TALAMANTEZ: Ok, that sounds good.

COMPOGINIS: Yeah.

TALAMANTEZ: Alright, well any last memories you want to document Irene, any last, anything?

COMPOGINIS: I think, probably, the happiest memory is the fact I was born and raised Greek and got to meet my beautiful husband at the Greek Orthodox Church, he was born and raised there. And we always said the happiest times of our lives is while we were together at our Greek church and we saw what took place with our grand children, our children. And our children, it's wonderful, I have beautiful daughter-in-laws that they have all been involved with the church.

TALAMANTEZ: Let me ask you one last question, when you were telling me you were in the choir and you went to Berkeley and you danced with him, did you know him here in the church?

COMPOGINIS: Not that well.

TALAMANTEZ: Did you recognize him?

COMPOGINIS: Oh, I knew who he was.

TALAMANTEZ: Oh, you knew who he was?

COMPOGINIS: I knew who he was?

TALAMANTEZ: Did you think he was handsome?

COMPOGINIS: Extremely so. [Laughter] Extremely so. And I have to say he was an extremely special man.

TALAMANTEZ: And did you used to flirt with him?

COMPOGINIS: No. I have to say that we were very, you know. It was the way we were, I guess it was the way we were raised, our parents, that particular generation, you know, were strict. But we would see each other in church and smile. And they would always, all the young men would gather together, you know, in one place. It was interesting, very interesting and very nice.

TALAMANTEZ: So it was a great meeting in Berkeley?

COMPOGINIS: It was. A special meeting in Berkeley. [Laughter]

TALAMANTEZ: All right, any last thoughts before I turn off the microphone for you.

COMPOGINIS: I am just very grateful for our wonderful wonderful church and very thankful for what has taken place with our children and our grand children.

TALAMANTEZ: The church seems to be the center everything of the community.

COMPOGINIS: Yeah yeah and for all the wonderful people that we've been involved with there.

TALAMANTEZ: That's wonderful.

COMPOGINIS: Everybody is just super perfect. [Laughter]

TALAMANTEZ: Thank you so much.

COMPOGINIS: Oh honey, you are welcome. I'm just... [Tape ends]